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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRAGUE 000064

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAL](#) [IZ](#) [EZ](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: THE MOUSE THAT ROARED: CZECH EFFORTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Classified By: Political Officer, Kimberly C. Krhounek,
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary. During a January 10 lunch discussion, MFA Director of Middle East Affairs Ivo Silhavy discussed the Czech role in the Middle East Peace Process and upcoming elections in Iraq. The Czechs see the Middle East as an area where they can play a role as an honest broker, making use of its good relations with Israel, Palestinian leaders and neighboring Arab states, as well as capitalizing on its "neutral" status as a small country with no ulterior motives in the region. The Czech Republic will also serve this year as the NATO Contact Embassy for Israel. Silhavy also discussed strong GOCR interest in sending observers to monitor Iraqi elections later this month, and the MFA's efforts to keep its Iraqi development budget from being raided by those seeking to boost Czech assistance to victims of the South Asia tsunamis. End summary.

12. (C) Silhavy said that the Czechs were very pleased with the January 9 elections in the Palestinian Authority, noting that they appeared to be largely free and fair. This gives Mahmoud Abbas a fairly broad mandate to represent the Palestinian people in re-starting the peace process. He noted that both sides seemed ready to come back to the negotiating table -- something that has often been missing historically. The GOCR has made assisting the Middle East Peace Process a foreign policy priority and they are committed to seeing the roadmap implemented. Silhavy said that the Czech Republic enjoys a reputation in the region as being "neither pro-Israeli, nor pro-Palestinian" and that it enjoys good relations with neighboring Arab countries as well. FM Svoboda completed a trip to the Middle East in December 2004, where he visited a number of Arab states and in Israel met with the PM, FM and the Israeli Knesset, as well as with Palestinian leaders. This year, the Czech Embassy will serve as the NATO Contact embassy for Israel. Silhavy stated that one advantage of the Czech Republic is that, due to it's being a small country rather than a superpower or major foreign policy player, it can bring ideas and encouragement to the table without anyone suspecting them of having another "agenda" where affecting the outcome could be put to their benefit.

13. (C) Silhavy was also very interested in this month's elections in Iraq. He said the MFA had identified a small number of people (probably 2-5) who are willing to go to Iraq to serve as election observers. The GOCR is now waiting for further word from the Coalition authorities as to how security will be managed, in order to complete planning for their participation. The Czechs met with a group of 25 countries in Ottawa that is considering basing election observers out of Amman, Jordan, but they are also reviewing other possible missions where they can contribute. The missing details about security will determine the final outcome; they want to know how the coalition plans to guarantee security for voters and observers on election day. Silhavy is also occupied with guarding his Iraqi assistance and development budget (approximately \$1.4 million in transformation and cooperation funds), following the proposal by Minister of Industry and Trade Milan Urban to raid some of the Iraq budget to boost Czech assistance to the tsunami-stricken areas of South Asia. Silhavy said that a

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final decision on this should take place on January 19 and that he was hopeful that his budget would remain intact. After all, he noted wryly, "there is always money" if the government decides it is a priority.

14. (C) The conversation also briefly touched on the issue of democracy in the Middle East and whether the Palestinian elections would spur additional democratization initiatives in the region. Silhavy said that if Iraq can get the security situation under control, it will be the major test case for implementing democracy in the Middle East, which is now being "exported" there, rather than arising domestically.

15. (C) Comment. Silhavy, like the two preceding MFA Middle East Department Directors, is a strong supporter of USG policies in the region. Outside of Europe, promoting democratic change in both the Middle East and Cuba are two of the GOCR's most significant foreign policy goals. Despite

(or perhaps because of) the lack of a visible connection in both places, the Czechs have the ability to play a unique role in supporting USG initiatives there. In both the Middle East and Cuba, the Czech Republic has shown the willingness to take a stand within the EU to push for policy initiatives, it has a wealth of experience in transitioning to democratic institutions and a market economy to share, and it believes that as a small country with no ulterior motives, it can play a significant role as "honest broker." The Czechs want a strong partnership with the U.S. in these areas. If kept informed on USG policy initiatives, they will often be natural allies in helping shape the EU positions on issues when we seek European backing. End comment.

16. BAGHDAD MINIMIZE CONSIDERED.

HILLAS